



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 17, 2000

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CHAIRMAN FLOYD D. SPENCE

GENERAL DEBATE ON H.R. 4205

FY 2001 NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. Speaker, on May 10, the Armed Services Committee reported H.R. 4205 on a strong bipartisan vote of 56-1. This bill – the first defense authorization bill prepared for the new millennium – makes a good start toward ensuring that America's military can meet the challenges that lie ahead and ensure the safety and security of all Americans well into the 21st century. However, it is only a beginning, not an end.

In recent years, the committee has called attention to the problems faced by the men and women who so proudly serve their country in uniform. Serious readiness deficiencies and equipment modernization shortfalls, made worse by longer and more frequent deployments away from home, have placed increasing strains on a military that is still being asked to do more with less. Moreover, the increasing use of America's armed forces on missions where vital U.S. national security interests are not at stake has reduced military readiness and affected recruiting, retention, and morale.

The defense bill before us today seeks to correct many of these problems. It is the fifth year out of the last six in which Congress has added to the Administration's budget request. I am pleased to report that, in real terms, after more than a decade of decline in defense spending, this downward spiral has finally been halted. Nevertheless, although this bill contains \$309.9 billion for defense – an increase of \$4.5 billion over the Administration's defense budget request – a serious mismatch between requirements, forces, and resources continues to exist. H.R. 4205 seeks to address the most critical deficiencies faced by our military today.

While some would argue that the end of the Cold War allows us to cut defense further, the bill we are debating today must be seen in proper perspective. In reality, the level of resources we devote to defense remains at a historically low level – roughly three percent of this nation's gross domestic product. This is hardly an exorbitant price to pay to defend our freedom, our values, and our national interests around the world.

Moreover, the threats we face today are in many ways more difficult and challenging than those we faced during the Cold War. The increasing number of states seeking to develop or acquire weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles – against which we have no defense – poses a qualitatively new set of challenges to our national security. Other threats are emerging – new forms of terrorism, the outbreak of long suppressed ethnic conflicts, and the spread of sophisticated military technologies to potential adversaries.

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While the United States remains the world's sole military superpower, we need to adapt to the changing realities and threats that we will face in the new millennium. This requires a growing level of investment in the tools and the people necessary to keep our country at least one step ahead of any potential adversary. As former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger testified recently before the Armed Services Committee, and I quote, "we are resting on our laurels as the sole superpower." He noted that under the Administration's current and planned levels of defense funding, the United States would be unable to sustain even our current level of military capability. "This is not a matter of opinion," he stated, "it is a matter of simple arithmetic."

In fact, the Administration has underfunded the U.S. defense effort for years. This year alone, the Joint Chiefs of Staff identified nearly \$16 billion in unfunded military requirements. Since last year, the Chief's five-year estimate of shortfalls has increased from \$38 billion to \$84 billion. The result of this chronic underfunding has been an increase in risk – risk to our country, risk to our interests, and risk to the men and women who defend us. The time has come to reduce that risk.

This year's debate over the defense budget highlighted a general consensus that U.S. defense spending has fallen too far too fast. During the Armed Services Committee's oversight hearings earlier this year, the real debate revolved not around whether there is a defense shortfall, but rather its size, magnitude, and implications. Some observers have characterized the current situation as a coming "train wreck."

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 4205 is designed to help put America's defenses back on track. In overwhelmingly bipartisan fashion, the committee has targeted increases to the Administration's budget request on a series of initiatives to improve readiness, modernize equipment, and enhance quality of life for our armed forces. This bill represents a sound approach to defense policy that bases the level of resources we provide on the magnitude of the threats we face. It is based on a strategy that seeks to protect America's interests abroad and ensure America's safety at home. This bill is tailored to provide the minimum level of resources necessary to carry out our country's global responsibilities.

In a moment, my colleagues on the Armed Services Committee will discuss the improvements contained in this bill in greater detail. However, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the hard work and support of the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the Armed Services Committee's subcommittees and panels. Their strong leadership and bipartisan commitment to ensuring the best for our service personnel resulted in the bill we are now debating. H.R. 4205 is a tribute to their dedication and commitment.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to pay tribute to the Armed Services Committee staff. In my six years as committee Chairman, I and the other members of the committee have been fortunate to have been able to rely upon their expertise and professionalism. I thank them for their tireless efforts in support of the committee and our nation's military.

Mr. Speaker, this is likely the last defense authorization bill I will submit to the House as Chairman of the Armed Services Committee. I have worked very hard to see to it that our military is second to none, not second to one. I am proud of what we have accomplished in this bill and believe it deserves the support of all Members. I urge my colleagues to strongly support this defense bill and I reserve the balance of my time.

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